THE UNIVERSAL FELLOWSHIP OF METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCHES

ALERT

News from the UFMCC on AIDS Legislation, Education, Research and Treatment.

April 1993

AIDS Ministry at MCC of the Blue Ridge

Rev. Tom Bohache, the Pastor of MCC of the Blue Ridge in Roanoke, VA, says of his church's AIDS Ministry: "Many of the people in this area tend to be very closeted about being gay or lesbian, so HIV makes them even more closeted. But we do the best we can to be there for people when they're ready."

Roanoke is a city of 250,000, and is located in the beautiful Blue Ridge Mountains, about an hour away from Lynchburg, the home of Jerry Falwell and his church's Liberty University.

Rev. Bohache was the first clergyperson to engage in HIV/AIDS work in the area. More clergy have followed: at a recent interfaith AIDS service, there were Unitarian, Baptist, Lutheran and Episcopal clergy involved, as well as the Mayor and City Council of Roanoke. Bohache reports that a former mayor, who is a Southern Baptist minister, has also been very supportive.

MCC of the Blue Ridge has 38 members, and has about 50 people in attendance on any Sunday. Like many smaller MCC's in more rural areas of the U.S., MCC of the Blue Ridge works hand in hand with the local AIDS service organizations, the AIDS Council of Western Virginia, and the Blue Ridge AIDS Support Services. Rev. Bohache served on the Board of the Blue Ridge AIDS Support Services for the last two years, and now two members of MCC sit on that Board. Rev. Bohache's lover is the Executive Director of the AIDS Council of Western Virginia.

Rev. Bohache reports that there are a number of persons with HIV in the surrounding rural areas, and a large percentage of persons with HIV whom they serve are African-American women.

One of the primary ways that MCC of the Blue Ridge ministers to persons with HIV is through cash assistance. The Gene Gardner Memorial Fund was established in 1989, in memory of the first member of MCC of the Blue Ridge to die of the complications of AIDS. The Gardner family established the fund with an initial cash donation, and more money has been gathered through benefit concerts, the HIV/AIDS Vigils of Prayer, and through special offerings taken the first Sunday of each month. The Music Director of the church, who was Gene Gardner's lover, is very active in HIV/AIDS work, having lived with HIV asymptomatically for 9 years. His benefit concert in September, 1992, raised over $800 for the Gardner Fund.

Rev. Tom Bohache and Ellen Whitt lighting the "Healing Candle".

The Gardner Fund has given out at least $3,000 since Rev. Bohache arrived in 1990. This primarily goes to people with HIV/AIDS outside the church. The AIDS Council of Western Virginia refers clients to the church for items not covered by

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HIV/AIDS Programming Expanded for GCXVI

The UFMCC General Conference XVI, July 17-25, 1993 in Phoenix, AZ, will feature numerous workshops and activities for persons affected by HIV/AIDS.

Monday through Friday evenings at 5:30 p.m., there will be "Spiritual Strength for Survival" Support Groups for persons with HIV/AIDS to network and share with each other. At previous General Conferences, the HIV/AIDS Support Groups have been important opportunities not only for support and sharing, but for making new friends.

Returning to Phoenix will be Alexandria Levine, M.D., to present the 1993 HIV/AIDS Medical Update. Dr. Levine is a world-renowned hematologist and HIV/AIDS researcher. She is a Professor of Medicine and Chief of Hematology at the University of Southern California School of Medicine.

Also returning to conduct workshops at General Conference XVI will be Alison Arngrim, noted AIDS activist and educator, and one of the stars of the long-running hit TV series, "Little House on the Prairie." Ms. Arngrim has traveled extensively throughout the Fellowship since the last General Conference, raising funds for local MCC AIDS Ministry programs, and educating and inspiring congregations in their efforts against HIV/AIDS.

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Medical Notes

[The following four articles are reprinted with permission from "Treatment Issues," Volume 7, Number 2, published by the Gay Men's Health Crisis, New York, NY.]

Organization For Women With HIV

WORLD (Women Organized to Respond to Life-threatening Diseases) is an organization "by, for and about women facing HIV disease." WORLD's important work includes publishing a newsletter, providing desperately-needed information and support, and sponsoring retreats for women with HIV. For more information, call (510) 658-6930, fax (510) 601-9746, or write WORLD, P.O. Box 11535, Oakland, CA 94611. ▼

Depression and Nutrition

Joan Priestley, M.D. of Los Angeles has written to suggest that, in her view, nutritional deficiencies common in HIV-positive individuals can cause cognitive and emotional changes. She believes that restoring these nutrients (especially vitamin B) should be considered when treating depression in HIV-seropositive patients.

Dr. Priestley advises that in the last six years she has utilized high-dose vitamin B (including B-6 and B-12) injections on over 600 persons with AIDS. She claims that since utilizing these vitamin B injections she no longer sees cases of depression or "AIDS dementia" (now referred to as "HIV-related neuro-cognitive disease") in her practice. ▼

New Zealand's Hero Project

MCC Auckland reports that an organization, "The HERO Project," has been established in New Zealand "to celebrate and strengthen the pride and health of gay and lesbian people, to promote the importance of safe sex and the reality of HIV/AIDS, and to raise funds for HIV/AIDS prevention and support services in Auckland."

The HERO Project was developed during 1990 to provide an event for gay and bisexual men that would act as a vehicle for the promotion of safe sex practices, and which would empower the gay community to respond effectively to HIV/AIDS. In 1991, HERO threw "The Party" which raised $16,000 for HIV/AIDS prevention and support services and produced the first HERO paper, which is acclaimed both internationally and in New Zealand as a model of health promotion.

The HERO Project in 1992 became a gay and lesbian collaboration and raised $60,000. The production of the larger HERO paper and associated sponsorship, combined with a week of associated cultural and sporting events, culminated with 3,700 people attending the party, called HERO 2.

The HERO Project in 1993 is pursuing a number of activities. The HERO Paper, released in December 1992, is a 48-page safe sex publication also containing portraits of heroism in the face of the AIDS epidemic. The HERO Festival, a celebration of diversity, including arts, sporting, and cultural events opened February 2. And HERO 3, the "ultimate" gay and lesbian dance party, was held Feb. 20 at Princes Wharf in Auckland.

The theme of the HERO Project in 1993 is "the HERO within, or the heroes of everyday life," -- in other words, everyone should celebrate individual heroism! ▼

Affording Care

Affording Care is a nonprofit U.S. organization dedicated to promoting the "financial empowerment of individuals who are seriously ill." The group publishes a newsletter providing information designed to help people make maximum use of the current U.S. health care system and avoid medically-caused impoverishment. Call (212) 262-9449 for more information. ▼

Cats Not A Significant Risk For Toxo

A report in the "Journal of the American Medical Association" (269:76-77, 1/6/93) found that people with HIV who owned cats were not at significantly greater risk of developing toxoplasmosis. The study of HIV-positive individuals found that 9.7% were positive for toxo antibodies and that 2% became toxo-positive over a one-to-five year follow up period. Of those who gave pet history records, only one individual had owned, lived with, or had close contact with a cat during the period of toxo seroconversion. The researchers also conducted a random survey of 87 HIV-positive individuals and found that 65% had owned or lived with a cat in the past five years, and that of these, only 12% tested positive for toxo antibodies. The authors conclude "that the routine use of serial testing for toxoplasmosis antibody is not likely to be cost-effective in HIV-infected adult patients in the U.S. ▼

ACTG Expands Sites For Proposed HIV Trial

The AIDS Clinical Trials Group (ACTG) of the U.S. National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) has selected six additional candidate sites for the proposed trial of a novel, three-drug combination therapy for HIV infection. The trial, ACTG 241, has been in development since early January 1993.

According to the proposed design, all participants must have advanced HIV disease. Selected participants must have taken antiretroviral drugs such as zidovudine (AZT) or didanosine (ddI) for more than six months. Patients will be randomly selected to participate in either of two therapy regiments: a combination of 600 milligrams (mg) AZT and 400 mg. ddI daily versus the AZT/ddI combination plus a third drug, a non-nucleoside called nevirapine, in a 400 mg. dose daily, a total of 48 weeks. ACTG 241 is one of many multiple-drug combination therapies for HIV that NIAID has in development or under way.

Individuals seeking additional information should call 1-800-TRIALS-A, which is open from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. EST and available in English and Spanish. ▼

Rev. Dee Dale Co-Facilitates Regional AIDS Meeting

Rev. Dee Dale, Pastor of MCC Louisville, KY, co-facilitated one of the 25 regional meetings which were held around the U.S. to provide grass-roots input to the final AIDS agenda President Clinton is expected to present to congress. The meeting was held January 28, 1993, at the Quality Hotel Downtown, in Louisville.

Among the over 110 participants were individuals living with HIV/AIDS, health care workers, religious leaders, state and county health officials, and representatives of AIDS service organizations. The region represented at this meeting included Kentucky; Nashville, TN; Cincinnati, OH; and Evansville and Indianapolis, IN.

The day-long meeting included an open forum, during which participants could raise issues which they wished to see included in a regional AIDS agenda. Small group discussions followed, in which issues were discussed and debated. A written recommendation for action was developed by each group. The recommendation and the open forum discussion have been compiled into a document to be submitted for inclusion in the national recommendation, "Federal AIDS Agenda '93."

Recommendations were divided into five categories: Discrimination and Advocacy for People Living with AIDS/HIV Disease; AIDS/HIV Services and Care; AIDS/HIV Prevention and Education; Funding for AIDS/HIV Programs; and Public Policy. Participants at the meeting chose two representatives to attend the national meeting, held Feb. 27-28 in Washington, D.C.

Rev. Dale told ALERT that the meeting was full of passion, urgency, and energy. One of the participants, James Hyde, Ph.D., a member of the faculty of the University of Louisville School of Medicine as well as the Board of Directors of the AIDS National Interfaith Network, praised Rev. Dale's skill in facilitating the meeting. ▼

ALERT

ALERT is a monthly newsletter containing information on AIDS Legislation, Education, Research and Treatment. The Editor is Rev. Dr. A. Stephen Pieters. For more information, or to send a donation, please write or call: ALERT, c/o UFMCC 5300 Santa Monica Blvd., Suite 304, Los Angeles, CA 90029; phone: (213) 464-5100.

HIV/AIDS at GCXVI

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AIDS Ministry workshops will include:

* Creating AIDS Ministry in the Small Church
* Bereavement Ministry as Evangelism
* New Age and Traditional Theology in AIDS Ministry
* Safer Sex Negotiating Skills
* Humor and Healing
* Church Leaders in Health Crisis
* HIV/AIDS Public Policy in the U.S.A.
* Do Opposites Attract? A Dialogue Among Men who are HIV-positive and HIV negative ▼

Blue Ridge

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government grants. The AIDS Ministry Team at MCC wrote the guidelines before Rev. Bohache arrived: a client is entitled to $300 per year for housing assistance, such as rent or utilities, and an additional $300 per year for medical needs, such as medical equipment or prescriptions.

In the past, the church has run a food bank, but since they do not have a building, distribution became a problem. The AIDS Council is trying to establish a drop-in center, since so many clients come from rural areas outside Roanoke, and they have nowhere to go while they're waiting for services. When the drop-in center is opened, MCC anticipates re-establishing their food bank there, as well as a clothing bank.

In the September, 1992 issue of "The Blue Ridge Banner," the newsletter of MCC of the Blue Ridge, Rev. Bohache writes: "In the Book of the Prophet Isaiah we read: 'Comfort, O comfort my people...' (Isaiah 40:1). I remember that this was the theme scripture when MCC's worldwide first began holding AIDS Prayer Vigils and Awareness Days in the mid-1980's. At that point there was not as much medical knowledge, nor as many treatments to prolong life for HIV-affected people, so frequently comfort was the only thing that could be offered in the midst of this devastating disease.

"Now in the early 1990's there is more that can be done medically. An HIV-positive test result no longer has to be a death sentence; there are treatments and medications which can prevent people with HIV from coming down with the opportunistic infections which used to mean certain death. The more scientists and health care providers learn, the more that can be added to the quality of life of those with HIV disease.

"But comfort is still necessary. Most people in our society still do not know all of the facts about AIDS/HIV. They cling to the ignorance which masquerades as fact on tabloid television. They discriminate against people with HIV, making them still after all these years feel like lepers. Sometimes basic rights such as housing and employment are denied, simply because of a virus lurking in the blood. It is often irrelevant that a federal law prohibits such discrimination; as blacks and women have learned all too well, where there is a will to discriminate, a way can always be found.

"That's why MCC's continue to hold AIDS events in the month of September. We at our church have done a variety of things over the years: 50-hour prayer vigils, educational forums, worship services. This year the interested people in our congregation decided that the best way we can provide comfort to those with AIDS/HIV is to continue to provide financial assistance through our Gene Gardner AIDS Memorial Fund; there are many necessities which are not covered by governmental aid, and our fund has stepped in to fill that void, to the tune of thousands of dollars.

"If we all do our part, the words of Isaiah will be realized: the uneven ground will become level, and the glory of God will be revealed, and all people will see it together." ▼

"It Is The Beginning Of The End of AIDS"

by Rory Crath, MCC Long Beach

[Editor's Note: This article is reprinted from the March, 1993 "HIV News" of MCC Long Beach. The Charismatic Conference referred to in the article is an annual event at MCC Long Beach which took place this year on February 12-14, 1993.]

At Charismatic Conference, a word of prophesy was revealed at the lighting of a candle. How appropriate, that this candle was an AIDS memorial candle, an act of remembrance for all the saints who have died from AIDS, a gentle reminder of our continued need to walk collectively in our fight against AIDS, and a symbol of hope and faith that God's light will continue to shine brightly in the darkness. How glorious too, that what had been discerned in prayer was that this conference was to be the beginning of the end of AIDS.

These words do not stand alone. Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson of MCC Los Angeles announced that the same discernment had been made at her church's healing service the week before.

And there are signs around us, from the political arena to the scientific/medical communities that we have indeed entered a new era in the AIDS pandemic. Twelve years of Republican silence has been broken by a new administration, by a new President who dared to utter the word AIDS in the first minute of his acceptance speech.

For the first time, at the World AIDS Conference in Amsterdam last year, researchers and physicians began referring to AIDS, not as a "fatal illness," but as a "chronic illness." With the practicing of "wellness medicine," early intervention, anti-retroviral/combination therapies, and use of prophylaxis (preventive medications) for PCP and MAI -- statistics show that there is no longer a rapid, linear progression from the time of seroconversion to death. And Dr. Mark Katz, HIV specialist and medical columnist in "Being Alive," Los Angeles, announced in a talk last week at St. Mary's Medical Center that "there would be a successful treatment...[and then he paused rather dramatically] dare I say a cure...within the next few years."

"...statistics show that there is no longer a rapid, linear progression from the time of seroconversion to death."

Good news has been proclaimed; but we are not called to just sit around and wait for the end of AIDS. With the Word comes action, both at an individual and collective level.

Remember, even though there is a Light shining brightly at the end of this tunnel, we are still surrounded by the darkness. And that means that we need to continue our fight, that we need to continue to walk hand in hand in faith towards that Light. Let's make today the time of the Beginning of new actions. ▼

Book Review:
Families Re-membered
by the Rev. Louis F. Kavar, Ph.D.

Families Re-Membered is a much expanded second edition of *Pastoral Ministry in the Aids Era*, by the Rev. Louis F. Kavar, Ph.D. The original book was published by the College of Chaplains in 1988. This new edition is published by Chi Rho Press, P.O. Box 7864, Gaithersburg, MD 20898.

This new edition incorporates many of the changes that have occured in the last five years in the field of HIV/AIDS: changes in terminology, the new treatments and prophylaxes, and the shift in needs presented to caregivers as people live longer, and often without symptoms.

The new edition helps attune caregivers to the restructured relationships within family systems of persons living with HIV/AIDS. Dr. Kavar writes that HIV/AIDS causes a shift in family dynamics so that families are often restructured, enlarged and changed - "remembered."

Families Re-membered includes in its definition of family, the realities of the families of choice, on whom many persons with HIV/AIDS depend. In addition, the book considers the impact of HIV/AIDS on communities of faith, and explores the relationship of addictions to life with HIV/AIDS.

Dr. Kavar's book is grounded in his own counseling practice, and is clearly and intelligently written. Dr. Kavar has been an invaluable resource to UFMCC in facing HIV/AIDS. His books on bereavement, liturgical resources, and pastoral care have been of consistently high quality, and this new, expanded edition of his 1988 book further reinforces his reputation as a skilled and sensitive counselor, writer, and teacher.

Dr. Kavar is Field Director for the Global Outreach program of World Church Extension for the UFMCC. He has been extensively involved in HIV/AIDS Ministry since 1983.

This book review was by Rev. Dr. A. Stephen Pieters. ▼